

The Wild Water Ride – Stawell's Water Supply



The Zig Zag flume was just one section of the aqueduct in the Grampians. (Illustrated Australian News, 5 October 1881)

In the late 19th century, Stawell's water supply took a wild zig zag ride from Fyans Creek in the Grampians down flumes and syphons, through a mountain, and along a 25 kilometre pipeline to storages at Big Hill above Stawell.

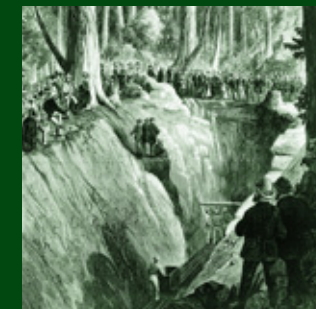
This far-sighted system was conceived and designed by John D'Alton, Stawell's Borough Engineer who also supervised its construction by contractors and Council labourers. Work started in 1875 and finished in 1881.



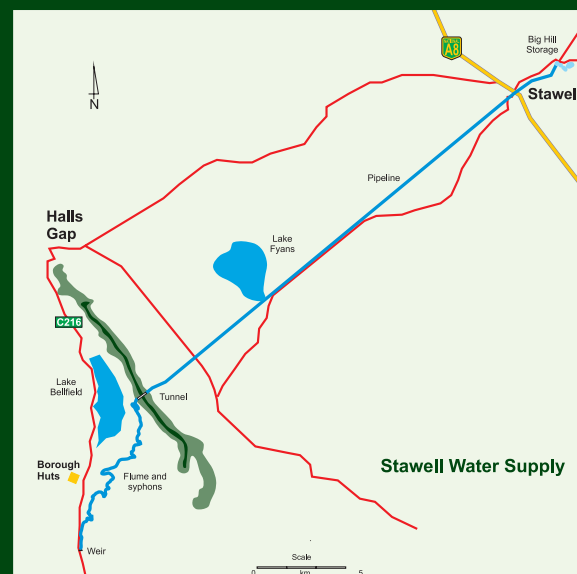
The original weir in Fyans Creek.



A section of old steel flume leading to one of the inverted syphons.



Work commenced on the west end of the tunnel on 18 February 1875.



A diversion weir high in the Grampians ensures an adequate supply of water to Stawell. The system operates entirely by gravity – no pumps are required – and up to 10 million gallons (38 megalitres) a day could be delivered to the storage reservoirs on Big Hill.

The flumes and syphons have now been replaced with underground pipes but much of Stawell's water supply still comes from Fyans Creek and parts of the original system are still in use.

John D'Alton

D'Alton came to Australia from Tipperary, Ireland, in 1861 and first worked as a surveyor in Ararat. He was appointed Borough Engineer in 1869. D'Alton also designed the Town Hall in Stawell. The reserve at Big Hill and a fountain on Stawell's Main Street are named after him.

Fyans Creek Diversion Weir

Fyans Creek rises high in the Grampians and, to this day, offers a reliable source of clean water. A small weir was built to divert some of the flow into the flume system. A new weir was built a few metres down stream to better meet current supply needs.

Big Hill Storage

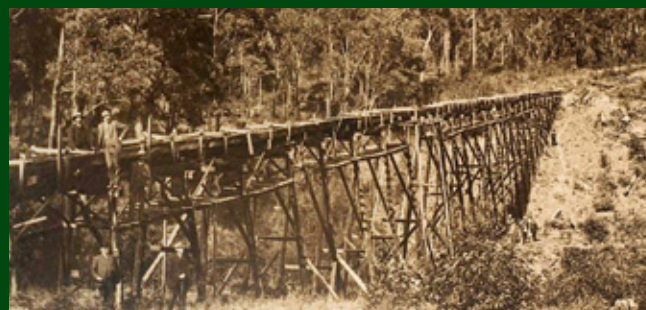
The original brick-lined reservoir could hold 11 megalitres. Additional reservoirs have been constructed and a total of 500 megalitres can now be stored. A chlorination plant was added in 1978.

Flumes & Syphons

A 12 kilometre wooden flume was built through dense bush to the tunnel. Later this was replaced with steel fluming on stone pillars to resist bushfires. To cross gullies, inverted syphons or aqueducts carried on timber trestles were built. The flume system was replaced with an underground pipeline in 1955.

Blasting the Tunnel

To get supply to Stawell, a one-kilometre-long tunnel was blasted through the side of the Grampians. Work started from both ends in 1875 and the sections met with great precision in 1881. For the first time in Victoria, dynamite was used – it was safer and more effective than black powder. D'Alton also used a new type of rock drilling machine powered by compressed air. From the tunnel, a pipeline ran across the plain to storage reservoirs above the town at Big Hill. With various delays, the tunnel took five years to complete but is still in service.



One of the original timber aqueducts.

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